

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Thomas Harley, # 162293, ) C/A No. 3:06-1792-RBH-JRM  
vs. )  
Plaintiff, )  
vs. ) Report and Recommendation  
NFN Beioh, Doctor at Kershaw Correctional Institution; )  
NFN Gardner, Nurse at KCI; )  
Lt. Robinson, at KCI; )  
BRCI Prison Officials; and )  
Jon Ozmint, Director of SCDC, )  
Defendants. )  
vs. )

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## ***Background of this Case***

The plaintiff is an inmate at the Broad River Correctional Institution of the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC). The plaintiff alleges that he was assaulted by a correctional officer, “strip-celled” under freezing conditions in 1999, and suffered frostbite as a result. The plaintiff also raises medical care issues and alleges concealment and a “continuing wrong” up through May 30, 2006.

In an order filed in this case on June 21, 2006 (Entry No. 3), the undersigned directed the plaintiff to answer Special Interrogatories and to submit items needed to render this case into "proper form." The plaintiff has done so and has also submitted a document in which he adds as a defendant Jon Ozmint, who is listed by the plaintiff as the "Commissioner" of the South Carolina Department of Corrections. Mr. Ozmint is actually the Director of the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC).<sup>1</sup>

Since the plaintiff essentially raises two issues in this case (the allegations from 1999 [assault and strip-celling] and the "continuing wrong" allegations), the Special Interrogatories answered by the plaintiff requested information on exhaustion of administrative remedies as to each issue. The plaintiff's Answers to the Court's Special Interrogatories (Entry No. 6) indicate that the plaintiff administratively exhausted his "strip-celling" matters in 1999, but that he filed his grievance on the "continuing wrong" allegations on June 5,

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<sup>1</sup>Prior to 1993, South Carolina law provided that the now-superannuated State Board of Corrections was to govern the actions of the Department of Corrections (SCDC). See "old" § 24-1-40, South Carolina Code of Laws. At that time, the Code of Laws of the State of South Carolina vested exclusive authority relating to prisoners on the State Board of Corrections and the Commissioner of the SCDC. See "old" § 24-1-130, § 24-1-140, § 24-3-20, and § 24-3-30, South Carolina Code of Laws. Although the so-called South Carolina "Restructuring" Act of 1993, 1993 S.C. Acts 193, effective July 1, 1993, abolished the State Board of Corrections, it did not abolish the duties of the Commissioner, who is now called the "Director." See § 24-1-40, South Carolina Code of Laws.

2006. The grievance on the “continuing wrong” allegations is still pending as of July 6, 2006.<sup>2</sup>

## ***Discussion***

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review<sup>3</sup> has been made of the *pro se* pleadings pursuant to the procedural provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915; 28 U.S.C. § 1915A; and the Prison Litigation Reform Act. The review has been conducted in light of the following precedents: Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25, 118 L.Ed.2d 340, 112 S.Ct. 1728, 1992 U.S. LEXIS® 2689 (1992); Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 324-325, 1989 U.S. LEXIS® 2231 (1989); Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519 (1972); Nasim v. Warden, Maryland House of Correction, 64 F.3d 951, 1995 U.S.App. LEXIS® 26108 (4th Cir. 1995)(*en banc*), *cert. denied*, 516 U.S. 1177, 134 L.Ed.2d 219, 116 S.Ct. 1273, 1996 U.S. LEXIS® 1844 (1996); Todd v. Baskerville, 712 F.2d 70 (4th Cir. 1983); and Boyce v. Alizaduh, 595 F.2d 948

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<sup>2</sup>The plaintiff has signed his Answers to the Court’s Special Interrogatories as of June 6, 2006. This is obviously a scrivener’s error.

<sup>3</sup>Pursuant to the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(B) and Local Civil Rule 73.02 (DSC), the undersigned is authorized to review such complaints for relief and submit findings and recommendations to the District Court.

(4th Cir. 1979)(recognizing the district court's authority to conduct an initial screening of a *pro se* filing).<sup>4</sup> *Pro se* complaints and petitions are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys, Gordon v. Leeke, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir.), *cert. denied*, Leeke v. Gordon, 439 U.S. 970 (1978), and a federal district court is charged with liberally construing a complaint or petition filed by a *pro se* litigant to allow the development of a potentially meritorious case. See Hughes v. Rowe, 449 U.S. 5, 9-10 & n. 7 (1980)(*per curiam*); and Cruz v. Beto, 405 U.S. 319 (1972). When a federal court is evaluating a *pro se* complaint or petition, the plaintiff's or petitioner's allegations are assumed to be true. Fine v. City of New York, 529 F.2d 70, 74 (2nd Cir. 1975). Even under this less stringent standard, this case is subject to summary dismissal. The requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim currently cognizable in a federal district court. Weller v. Department of Social Services, 901 F.2d 387, 1990 U.S.App. LEXIS® 6120 (4th Cir. 1990).

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<sup>4</sup>Boyce has been held by some authorities to have been abrogated in part, on other grounds, by Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319 (1989)(insofar as Neitzke establishes that a complaint that fails to state a claim, under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6), does not by definition merit *sua sponte* dismissal under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) [formerly 28 U.S.C. § 1915(d)], as "frivolous").

As earlier stated, the plaintiff's Answers to the Court's Special Interrogatories (Entry No. 6) reveal that his grievance concerning the "continuing wrong" claims — which was filed on June 5, 2006 — is still pending. As a result, this case is subject to summary dismissal because this grievance is pending. See 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(a), which was enacted as part of the Prison Litigation Reform Act; Porter v. Nussle, 534 U.S. 516, 524, 152 L.E.2d 12, 122 S.Ct. 983, 2002 U.S. LEXIS® 1373 (2002) ("[T]he PLRA's exhaustion requirement applies to all inmate suits about prison life, whether they involve general circumstances or particular episodes, and whether they allege excessive force or some other wrong."); Booth v. Churner, 531 U.S. 956, 149 L.Ed.2d 958, 121 S.Ct. 1819, 2001 U.S. LEXIS® 3982 (2001)(unanimous decision: PLRA requires administrative exhaustion even if grievance procedure does not allow monetary damages and prisoner seeks only monetary damages, so long as grievance tribunal has authority to take some responsive action); and Higginbottom v. Carter, 223 F.3d 1259, 2000 U.S.App. LEXIS® 21087 (11th Cir. 2000).

Although the lack of exhaustion of administrative remedies is, generally, considered an affirmative defense and not a jurisdictional infirmity in the Fourth Judicial Circuit, if the lack of exhaustion is apparent from the face of

the prisoner's complaint or from additional facts requested by the court, *sua sponte* dismissal prior to service of the complaint is appropriate. See Anderson v. XYZ Correctional Health Services, 407 F.3d 674, 683, 2005 U.S.App. LEXIS® 8698 (4th Cir. 2005).

In orders filed on May 9, 1996, this court certified that the inmate grievance procedure established by the South Carolina Department of Corrections met the standards required by 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(a)(2). See the orders filed in Misc. No. 3:96-MC-83-2 and Misc. No. 3:96-MC-84-2 (D.S.C., May 9, 1996).

In order to exhaust the SCDC administrative remedy, an inmate must fill out a Form 10-5, Step 1 about the matters raised in his Complaint and give the form to the Institutional Inmate Grievance Coordinator within **fifteen (15)** days of the alleged incident of which the inmate complains. The grievance coordinator has **five (5)** days from the time the grievance is presented by the inmate to put it into SCDC's automated system. Once the grievance is properly entered into the SCDC automated system, the Warden should then respond to the Step 1 grievance in writing within **forty (40)** days. If the inmate is not satisfied with the Warden's response, then, within **five (5)** days, he or she must file an appeal of the Step 1 grievance response by filing a Form

10-5a, Step 2 Appeals to the Responsible Official with the Inmate Grievance Coordinator. A responsible SCDC official will then have **sixty (60)** days to respond to the Step 2 grievance. The decision of the “responsible official” who answers Step 2 is the Department’s final response in the matter.

Even if SCDC fails to respond to the plaintiff’s Step 1 grievance and, as a result, leaves the plaintiff with no decision to appeal to Step 2, the plaintiff must still refrain from filing suit in federal court until all time periods for both steps to be completed have expired. Once the full period for prison responses has run without the issuance of any response, it is generally held that the inmate has substantially complied with the § 1997e exhaustion requirement. See, e.g., Boyd v. Corrections Corp. of America, 380 F.3d 989, 996, 2004 U.S.App. LEXIS® 18903 (6th Cir. 2004) (“Following the lead of the . . . other circuits that have considered this issue, we conclude that administrative remedies are exhausted when prison officials fail to timely respond to a properly filed grievance”), *cert. denied*, 73 U.S.L.W. 3555, 161 L.Ed.2d 477, 125 S.Ct. 1639, 2005 U.S. LEXIS® 2458 (2005); Jernigan v. Stuchell, 304 F.3d 1030, 1032, 2002 U.S.App. LEXIS® 19144 (10th Cir. 2002) (“agree[ing with other circuits] that the failure to respond to a grievance within the time limits contained in the grievance policy renders an administrative remedy

unavailable"); Lewis v. Washington, 300 F.3d 829, 833, 2002 U.S.App. LEXIS® 16388 (7th Cir. 2002)(stating that prison's failure timely to respond renders administrative remedies unavailable); Foulk v. Charrier, 262 F.3d 687, 698, 2001 U.S.App. LEXIS® 18707 (8th Cir. 2001)(holding that defendants failed to prove non-exhaustion where they presented no evidence to refute plaintiff's contention that he could not pursue grievance further after warden did not respond to his grievance); and Underwood v. Wilson, 151 F.3d 292, 295, 1998 U.S.App. LEXIS® 18884 (5th Cir. 1998)(holding that "available administrative remedies are exhausted when the time limits for the prison's response set forth in the prison Grievance Procedures have expired"), *cert. denied*, 526 U.S. 1133, 1999 U.S. LEXIS® 3500 (1999). Under such circumstances, an inmate of the South Carolina Department of Corrections who files a Step 1 grievance but receives no response thereto must wait at least 110 days (approximately four (4) months) from the time he or she files a Step 1 grievance before it may be said that he or she has exhausted "such administrative remedies as are available."<sup>5</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(a).

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<sup>5</sup>It appears that as long as the inmate waits the full 110 days established for the running of the entire process through Step 2, he or she may then file suit in federal court even though he or she has not formally completed Step 2. This is true because the SCDC policy states, in pertinent part, "[i]f, at the institutional level, the response to the grievance exceeds the established time limits, the grievance will automatically proceed to the next level of appeal." Section 14(e) of the SCDC policy. See Boyd; Jernigan; Lewis; Foulk; and (continued...)

The plaintiff's exhaustion of the "strip-celling" matter back in 1999 does not excuse his failure to exhaust his available remedies on the "continuing wrong" allegations. Woodford v. Ngo, 126 S.Ct. 2378, 2006 U.S. LEXIS® 4891 (U.S., June 22, 2006)(PLRA requires "proper exhaustion" of administrative remedies). Moreover, the plaintiff's failure to exhaust his "continuing wrong" allegations makes the complaint in this case what may best be described as a "mixed" civil rights case. Cf. Rose v. Lundy, 455 U.S. 509 (1982)(describing a "mixed" habeas corpus petition as one that contains both exhausted and unexhausted claims).

## ***Recommendation***

Accordingly, it is recommended that the District Court dismiss the above-captioned case *without prejudice* and without issuance and service of

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(...continued)

Underwood. The 110-day period is determined by giving the maximum amount of time provided in the SCDC policy for each step in the process and assuming that no extensions of time are sought and the SCDC fails to timely respond to the Step 1 grievance within the forty (40) days allowed or fails to request a specific continuance of the established time to respond by SCDC officials at any point during the process. See Section 16 of the SCDC Policy, which provides that all grievances are to be disposed of within 105 days from the entry of the Step 1 grievance. Since the institutional grievance coordinator has five (5) days to enter the Step 1 grievance, the sum of the five-day entry period and the 105-day period set forth in Section 16 is 110 days.

process. See Denton v. Hernandez, supra; Neitzke v. Williams, supra; Haines v. Kerner, supra; Brown v. Briscoe, 998 F.2d 201, 202-204 & n. \*, 1993 U.S.App. LEXIS® 17715 (4th Cir. 1993), *replacing* unpublished opinion originally tabled at 993 F.2d 1535 (4th Cir. 1993); Boyce v. Alizaduh, supra; Todd v. Baskerville, supra, 712 F.2d at 74; 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)[essentially a redesignation of "old" 1915(d)]; and "new" 28 U.S.C. § 1915A[as soon as possible after docketing, district courts should review prisoner cases to determine whether they are subject to summary dismissal]. The plaintiff's attention is directed to the Notice on the next page.

Respectfully submitted,

July 20, 2006  
Columbia, South Carolina

s/Joseph R. McCrorey  
United States Magistrate Judge

**Notice of Right to File Objections to Magistrate Judge's "Report and Recommendation"****&*****The Serious Consequences* of a Failure to Do So**

The plaintiff is hereby notified that any objections to the attached Report and Recommendation (or Order and Recommendation) must be filed within **ten (10) days** of the date of service. 28 U.S.C. § 636 and Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b). The time calculation of this ten-day period excludes weekends and holidays and provides for an additional three days for filing by mail. Fed. R. Civ. P. 6. A magistrate judge makes only a recommendation, and the authority to make a final determination in this case rests with the United States District Judge. See Mathews v. Weber, 423 U.S. 261, 270-271 (1976); and Estrada v. Witkowski, 816 F. Supp. 408, 410, 1993 U.S. Dist. LEXIS® 3411 (D.S.C. 1993).

During the ten-day period for filing objections, **but not thereafter**, a party must file with the Clerk of Court specific, written objections to the Report and Recommendation, if he or she wishes the United States District Judge to consider any objections. **Any written objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections.** See Keeler v. Pea, 782 F. Supp. 42, 43-44, 1992 U.S. Dist. LEXIS® 8250 (D.S.C. 1992); and Oliverson v. West Valley City, 875 F. Supp. 1465, 1467, 1995 U.S. Dist. LEXIS® 776 (D.Utah 1995). Failure to file specific, written objections shall constitute a waiver of a party's right to further judicial review, including appellate review, if the recommendation is accepted by the United States District Judge. See United States v. Schronce, 727 F.2d 91, 94 & n. 4 (4th Cir.), *cert. denied*, Schronce v. United States, 467 U.S. 1208 (1984); and Wright v. Collins, 766 F.2d 841, 845-847 & nn. 1-3 (4th Cir. 1985). Moreover, if a party files specific objections to a portion of a magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation, but does not file specific objections to other portions of the Report and Recommendation, that party waives appellate review of the portions of the magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation to which he or she did not object. In other words, a party's failure to object to one issue in a magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation precludes that party from subsequently raising that issue on appeal, even if objections are filed on other issues. Howard v. Secretary of HHS, 932 F.2d 505, 508-509, 1991 U.S. App. LEXIS® 8487 (6th Cir. 1991). See also Praylow v. Martin, 761 F.2d 179, 180 n. 1 (4th Cir.) (party precluded from raising on appeal factual issue to which it did not object in the district court), *cert. denied*, 474 U.S. 1009 (1985). In Howard, supra, the Court stated that general, non-specific objections are *not* sufficient:

A general objection to the entirety of the [magistrate judge's] report has the same effects as would a failure to object. The district court's attention is not focused on any specific issues for review, thereby making the initial reference to the [magistrate judge] useless. \*\*\* This duplication of time and effort wastes judicial resources rather than saving them, and runs contrary to the purposes of the Magistrates Act. We would hardly countenance an appellant's brief simply objecting to the district court's determination without explaining the source of the error.

Accord Lockert v. Faulkner, 843 F.2d 1015, 1017-1019 (7th Cir. 1988), where the Court held that the appellant, who proceeded *pro se* in the district court, was barred from raising issues on appeal that he did not specifically raise in his objections to the district court:

Just as a complaint stating only 'I complain' states no claim, an objection stating only "I object" preserves no issue for review. \*\*\* A district judge should not have to guess what arguments an objecting party depends on when reviewing a [magistrate judge's] report.

See also Branch v. Martin, 886 F.2d 1043, 1046, 1989 U.S. App. LEXIS® 15,084 (8th Cir. 1989) ("no *de novo* review if objections are untimely or general"), which involved a *pro se* litigant; and Goney v. Clark, 749 F.2d 5, 6 n. 1 (3rd Cir. 1984) (*per curiam*) ("plaintiff's objections lacked the specificity necessary to trigger *de novo* review"). **This notice, hereby, apprises the plaintiff of the consequences of a failure to file specific, written objections.** See Wright v. Collins, supra; and Small v. Secretary of HHS, 892 F.2d 15, 16, 1989 U.S. App. LEXIS® 19,302 (2nd Cir. 1989). Filing by mail pursuant to Fed. R. Civ. P. 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections addressed as follows:

**Larry W. Propes, Clerk  
United States District Court  
901 Richland Street  
Columbia, South Carolina 29201**